June 8, 2012

Honorable John Laird, Secretary
California Natural Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Secretary Laird:

As East Bay Legislators we are very concerned about the State Parks Department Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division's plans to expand Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) into the Tesla Park land. We oppose any effort to open the Tesla Park land to Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV). We ask that you initiate a reexamination of the policy decision to expand Carnegie SVRA and open the Tesla Park land to OHV use. Expansion of Carnegie SVRA is not consistent with the resource protection values or State Parks budget priorities for our East Bay districts.

We are aware that the OHMVR Division has made two attempts to gain environmental approval to expand Carnegie SVRA and OHV use into the Tesla Park land. In April, the Division began a third attempt to gain environmental approval of the project. It appears the Division intends to use a program EIR approach, which we do not believe would be appropriate for the project to open the Tesla Park land to OHV use. We would expect that a detailed, complete and comprehensive project level EIR be completed prior to any program level approval to open the Tesla Park land to OHV use. If the process is to be supportable, the EIR must also consider the alternative of no OHV use in Tesla Park.

Enclosed as Exhibit A are pictures of the pristine Tesla Park land. Given its abundance of rare historical, cultural, biological and scenic resources and consistency with Natural Resources Agency preservation objectives, Tesla State Park land deserves to be protected from OHV use.

Enclosed as Exhibit B are pictures of Carnegie SVRA, which clearly show the destructive impacts from the off road vehicle use. Carnegie SVRA is currently operating under a Cleanup and Abatement Order from the State Regional Water Quality Board.

We are also concerned about the budget and expenditures of the Division at Carnegie SVRA. It has been reported that the Division has set aside $20 million for the Tesla expansion project. When State Parks in our districts are being severely cut back and are under threat of closing, we are being asked by constituents to justify such inconsistent State Parks policies and budget expenditures.
Thank you very much for your assistance to reexamine the State Parks policy with regard to plans to expand Carnegie SVRA and open the Tesla Park land for OHV use. Please see our attached request for additional information. We look forward to receiving this data in a timely manner. We are certain we all share the objective to ensure that all State Parks units operate within a consistent set of guiding principles and budget priorities.

Sincerely,

Joan Buchanan,
Assemblymember, 15th District

Loni Hancock,
Senator, 9th District

Mark DeSaulnier,
Senator, 7th District

CC: Ruth Coleman, Director
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Phil Jenkins, Chief
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East Bay Regional Parks District
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Request for additional information:

We intend to continue to monitor Carnegie SVRA operations and the Tesla Park expansion project and examine OHMVR Division and State Parks Department policies, budgets and expenditures that affect our districts. To assist us in that process we request the following information:

- Purchase date, cost and acreage for each of the properties purchased for expansion of Carnegie SVRA, including but not limited to the Alameda purchase, Tesla purchase and several smaller parcels along Corral Hollow/Tesla Road that are being operated by the Division as park personnel housing and sector office units;

- Cost of remediation work by project from 2000 to present in the existing Carnegie SVRA and expansion areas, including but not limited to the SRI Loop project;

- Projected budgets amounts for future planned remediation projects by project at the existing Carnegie SVRA and the expansion areas during the proposed General Plan Period;

- Cost of the 3 major environmental reviews in 2000, 2004 and the current 2012/2013 process;

- Total budgeted amount planned for opening up the Tesla Park land for OHV use, including but not limited to environmental reviews, mitigation, operational implementation;

- Annual budget for Carnegie SVRA and expansion areas, including the park personnel housing and sector office units, from 2000 to the current budget year.

This information is necessary to determine to what degree the State Parks Department and OHMVR Division have the financial ability to both fully remediate all damage within the entire existing Carnegie SVRA on an ongoing basis and operate and remediate the proposed new project area in Tesla Park that is double the size of the existing SVRA.
Background:

The state purchased about 3,400 acres of land adjacent to and west of the current Carnegie State Vehicle Recreation Area (SVRA) in the late 1990s for the purpose of expanding the existing Carnegie SVRA. Part of the existing Carnegie SVRA and all of the new acquisition properties are located in Eastern Alameda County. We are committed to protecting natural resources and providing for desired recreation opportunities within our districts and region. Expansion of Carnegie SVRA into the Tesla Park land is not consistent with the resource protection values or State Parks budget priorities for our districts.

The Tesla Park land is a rare intact native landscape that meets multiple resource preservation objectives. Tesla Park includes the culturally significant and historic town site of Tesla, the location of the first commercial coal mines in California. Native American Ohlone and Yokuts peoples came to the Tesla Park land for seasonal hunting and gathering and trade. A petroglyph that is thought to be 5,000-10,000 years old is located in the park. Vestiges of the historic El Camino Viejo, a wagon road from Livermore to the Central Valley, dating from the Spanish period of California history, are located in Tesla Park.

Tesla Park holds important biological and natural resources. At least fifteen listed species of plants and wildlife have been sighted on the park land and about 30 identified based on known habitats and sightings on nearby properties. Habitat corridors from Mt. Diablo to Mt. Hamilton pass through the park. Tesla Park is centered at the convergence of four eco-zones and, therefore, contains unusual combinations of plants and animals not seen elsewhere in our region. A diverse range of vegetation such as Blue Oak woodlands, savanna grasslands, riparian woodlands, sage scrub and distinctive wildflowers blanket the hills. Tesla Park includes miles of the Corral Hollow Creek and watershed that nurtures its biological diversity. A portion of the park land drains into the Arroyo Seco and to the nearby Livermore wine region. Ridge top vistas of the Central Valley, Sierras and Mt. Diablo and dramatic canyons dominate the varied landscape. Because of these outstanding biological and ecological features, Tesla Park has been used as a research area for colleges and universities for decades and could be a valuable outdoor learning laboratory for schools.

In addition to these important on-site features, the Tesla Park land serves regional resource planning objectives. Alameda County land use plans for the Eastern Alameda County and the Tesla area call for preservation of open space not development or destruction. The location of Tesla Park provides a link in the East Bay Regional Park and trail system. It also presents a future opportunity to develop a recreation and preservation corridor between the East Bay and the Central Valley along Tesla/Corral Hollow road that can serve a wide range of other recreationists, in addition to the existing Carnegie SVRA.

Recent attempts to rehabilitate relatively small portions of Carnegie SVRA are a step in the right direction. However, further stated plans to improve operations have not been fully implemented or proven to be successful on a park-wide basis. We question why the State Parks Department is still allowing this costly expansion project when unacceptable conditions that exist at Carnegie SVRA have not yet been fully remediated.
EXHIBIT A

VIEWS OF TESLA PARK LAND
EXHIBIT B:

VIEWS OF CURRENT CARNEGIE STATE VEHICULAR RECREATION AREA IMPACT